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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 001483

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PASS TO AMEMBASSY GRENADA  
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PASS TO AMCONSUL QUEBEC  
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PASS TO AMCONSUL RECIFE  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG  
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/11/20

TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [CO](#) [VE](#) [OAS](#)

SUBJECT: VENEZUELA DESTROY BORDER BRIDGES; ACCUSES COLOMBIA OF  
PROVOCATION

REF: CARACAS 1444; CARACAS 1471

CLASSIFIED BY: DUDDY, AMBASSADOR, DOS, AMB; REASON: 1.4(A), (D)

This cable has images attached that are accessible to SMART System users.

¶1. (C) Summary: Venezuelan Army troops on November 19 demolished two locally constructed foot bridges joining villages in Colombia and Venezuela. General Aguero of the 2ND Infantry Division, at a press conference later that day, claimed the structures were "pedestrian crossings used by drug traffickers and paramilitaries" and added that Venezuela only recognized the bridges specified by treaty. Vice President CarrizC!lez called the action "a preservation of sovereignty," and categorized Colombia's intention to report the incident to the OAS and UN as "a new provocation." End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) During a tightly controlled November 19 press conference, GEN Eusebio Aguero, Commanding Officer of the TC!chira based 2ND Infantry Division, confirmed the use of explosives to fell two locally built pedestrian bridges (see photos) that joined villages in the Colombian state of Norte Santander and the Venezuelan state of TC!chira. Aguero stressed that the structures were pedestrian crossings not bridges. Aguero justified the destruction of these crossings by claiming they were used by narco-traffickers and Colombian right wing paramilitaries. In addition the general pointed out the bridges were blown up from the Venezuelan side, which is not restricted by any international treaty.

¶3. (SBU) Vice President RamC3n CarrizC!lez appeared November 19 on state-run channel VTV and called the Colombian claims of international bridges being blown up "a manipulation and provocation." He asserted the "improvised" and "illegal" runways were built and being used by narco-traffickers and contraband smugglers to violate Venezuelan sovereignty. CarrizC!lez claimed the Uribe administration was the "aggressor" and trying to hide the fact that Colombia had been converted into "one big Yankee military base."

¶4. (C) The head of the TC!chira state police told PolOff that locals thwarted the destruction of "Puente Alianza," a more

substantial metal bridge, but that at least a dozen other homemade bridges connect Colombia and Venezuela.

15. (SBU) Dr. Pompeyo Marquez, former Minister of Borders and the lead negotiator for ten years on the Venezuelan national border commission, told PolOff that the Bi-national Venezuela - Colombia Border Commission had recognized that indigenous communities used these bridges and added that the agreement between Venezuela and Colombia obliged both sides to "seek peaceful" resolutions to disputes. Marquez described a "golden age" of the Border Commission when regular meetings were held between governors, academics, military commanders and business leaders of both countries. When asked why the Bi-National Commission fell into disuse eight years ago, Marquez replied, "Chavez prefers confrontation."

16. (C) Comment: Destruction of these foot bridges is another way to ratchet up the pressure on Colombia and punish the population of opposition-led TC!chira. Venezuela's counter accusations are consistent with its strategy of (ref. a) of painting the GBRV as the victim of a Colombian - U.S. conspiracy to undermine the Bolivian revolution. End Comment.  
DUDDY